RESTORATION EARTH

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Native Plant Program Guide for Michigan Schools

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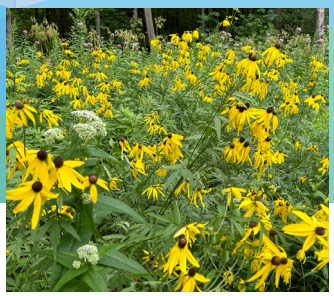
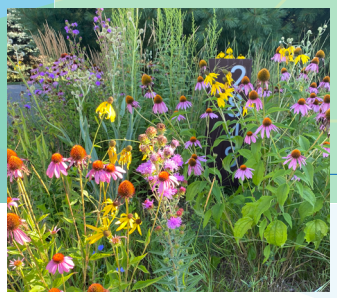
Program Detail

- Phase 1: Education & Awareness
- Phase 2: Student Engagement & Planning
- Phase 3: Site Preparation & Planting
- Phase 4: Cultivation & Maintenance
- Phase 5: Community Engagement & Expansion

Resources for Getting Started

RESTORATION EARTH

Program Overview

Program Vision

Introduce administrators, students, and communities to native plants as a tangible and environmentally conscious alternative to turf grass by creating sustainable pollinator habitats on school grounds.

This initiative will not only establish a thriving native habitat but also empower students and the community to take active roles in ecological restoration, fostering a culture of sustainability.

Learning Objectives

1. Environmental: Increase biodiversity, reduce water usage, and improve soil health.
2. Educational: Enhance student's understanding of ecosystems and sustainability.
3. Community: Greater engagement in environmental stewardship and community involvement with the school.
4. Scalability: A model program that other participants in Michigan Green Schools can replicate.

Phases

Phase 1: Education & Awareness (Months 1–3)
Objective: Equip students with knowledge about native plants, their ecological importance, and why native plants can be an alternative to resource-dependent turf grass.

Phase 2: Student Engagement & Planning (Months 4–6)
Objective: Involve students in the planning and preparation of native habitat establishment.

Phase 3: Site Preparation & Planting (Months 7–9)
Objective: Prepare the site for installation.

Phase 4: Cultivation & Maintenance (Months 10–12 and Ongoing)
Objective: Ensure the long-term success of the native habitat.

Phase 5: Community Engagement & Expansion (Year 2 and Beyond)
Objective: Scale up the program to inspire wider student and community involvement.



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Phase 1: Education & Awareness (Months 1–3)

Objective
Equip students with knowledge about native plants, their ecological importance, and why native plants can be an alternative to resource-dependent turf grass.

Educational Session
- Workshops and Lectures on Michigan's native ecosystems, benefits of native plants, and problems sustaining turf grass (e.g., water use, maintenance costs, fertilizer, and the loss of biodiversity)
- Guest Speakers could include local conservationists, native plant growers, and ecologists to discuss real-world applications

Interactive Learning
- Field Trips to local native plant gardens, nurseries, prairies, and restoration sites
- Hands-On Activities, for example, compare water retention in soil covered with turf vs. soils with native plants

Student Projects
- Create informational posters or presentations about native plant species and their importance to biodiversity
- Conduct surveys to identify locations on school grounds suitable for native plantings
- Create a Mission Statement for the project and include specific objectives to achieve the desired outcomes

Note: Teachers can expand the program and use it as an opportunity to create projects that are linear to the Native Plant project.



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Phase 2: Student Engagement & Planning (Months 4–6)

Objective
Involve students in the planning and preparation of native habitat establishment.

Site Selection
— Collaborate with school staff and native plant specialists to identify areas for native plantings to help achieve the mission of the project
— Evaluate factors like sunlight, soil type, water availability, and current land use

Plant Selection
— Students can research native plants suitable for the specific site chosen for installation (plants for wet clay sites, dry sandy sites, and different light conditions)
— Select plants based on their ecological role, site needs, and planting purpose (e.g., pollinator support, erosion control, beautification)

Create a Plan
— Students design the site and plant layout, incorporating diverse species and using best practices for installing native plants (If using plugs, how will plants be watered during the 3-4 month establishment period)
— Create a project timeline and budget for the planting process



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Phase 3: Site Preparation & Planting (Months 7–9)

Objective
Prepare the site for installation

Educational Signage
— Install signs explaining the purpose and benefits of the native habitat to educate visitors about the future of the site and the phases of development. Sign template is available in the Resources section of this guide.

Site Preparation
— Remove turf grass through methods like solarization, sod cutting, or chemical treatment. This could be an opportunity for students to explore different techniques and controversies surrounding each of these strategies
— Test the soil to understand the soil type (sand, clay, silt, peat, chalk and loam) and pH levels

Planting Day
— Organize a student-led planting event. Native plantings can be completed in June (when plugs are available) throughout the summer or the Fall (September, October). The optimal times for Native Seeding are November through May
— Assign tasks (digging, planting, mulching, watering) and ensure students understand planting techniques

Community Involvement
— Invite parents, local businesses, and community volunteers to assist. Invite donors and any other community leaders
— Use the event to raise awareness of the school's sustainability goals



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Phase 4: Cultivation & Maintenance (Months 10–12 and Ongoing)

Objective
Ensure the long-term success of the native habitat.

Student Maintenance Teams
— Understand potential invasive species and how to identify them
— Understand the best methods for eradicating invasive species (cut, remove, or chemical treatment)
— Assign students responsibility for watering, weeding, and monitoring plant growth
— Use this as an opportunity for hands-on science education (e.g., tracking pollinator visits).
— Explore different seasonal care techniques. Burning? (Maybe not a great idea with kids, but these services can be hired.) Cutting back and not cutting back in the fall or spring and documenting the differences in the meadow the following year

Seasonal Check-Ins
— Schedule periodic evaluations to replace failed plants or adjust care routines
— Incorporate mulch or other strategies to minimize weeds (cut, remove, chemical treatment)

Ongoing Management
— Create and implement an ongoing management plan to ensure the longevity of the native planting. On-going maintenance could be a mandatory requirement to keep the native plant program considered as part of a sites Michigan Green Schools' certification
— Create State of Michigan recognition and awards programs and program tracking. RE/MGS website tracker with affiliated schools and total sq ft allocated towards native plantings



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Phase 5: Community Engagement & Expansion (Year 2 and Beyond)

Objective
Scale up the program to inspire wider student and community involvement

Increase Acreage in the Program
— Add to the additional land under cultivation or choose a separate or different ecological area to diversify plant species

Seed Sales
— Harvest seeds from the established habitat to sell or distribute
— Partner with local native plant nurseries for fundraising events

Plant Sale
— For those schools with greenhouse facilities, grow plants from seeds for sale in the community

Workshops for the Community
— Host “how-to” workshops for families and local organizations to start their own native gardens

Replication Across the District
— Share success stories and best practices with other schools in the district
— Advocate for district-wide adoption of native landscaping

Certification and Recognition
— Apply for national awards or certifications (Homegrown National Park, Monarch Waystation, Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, World Wildlife Fund, etc.) to highlight the school’s leadership in sustainability

Resources for Getting Started

Botanical and Ecological Resources

- University of Michigan Herbarium
- Michigan Natural Features Inventory
- Enhancing Biological Control with Native Plants
- Illinois Wildflowers

Organizations Involved in Native Landscape and Environmental Stewardship

- Wild Ones
- Wildflowers Association of Michigan (WAM)
- The Stewardship Network
- Michigan Natural Shoreline Partnership
- Native Plant Guild

Invasive Plant Resources

- Midwest Invasive Plant Network
- Midwest Invasive Species Information Network (MISIN)
- Invasive Plant Field Guide (MNFI)